UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1996/1010
5 December 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION IN TAJIKISTAN

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 10 of Security Council resolution 1061 (1996) of 14 June 1996, in which the Security Council requested me to report to it every three months on the progress towards a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict and on the operations of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT). It provides an account of developments since my last report of 13 September 1996 (S/1996/754).

II. MAINTENANCE OF THE CEASEFIRE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION OF OBSERVERS IN TAJIKISTAN

2. The situation in Tajikistan during this period was marked by a fragile ceasefire in the Karategin Valley and sporadic fighting in the Tavildara sector, tensions in and around Dushanbe and along the Tajik-Afghan border, primarily in the Kalai-Khumb sector. In the rest of the country, the situation was relatively calm. This lasted until the end of November, when the situation deteriorated drastically following attacks by the opposition in the area of Garm.

3. At the time of my report of 13 September (S/1996/745), the opposition had taken control of the Karategin Valley from Garm to the Kyrgyz border, while government forces had been reinforced east of Dushanbe to counter the opposition's advance, and the opposition in its turn concentrated its fighters in Komsomolabad in preparation for a confrontation. In an effort to defuse the situation, the Joint Commission, supported by UNMOT, arranged for a high-level government delegation to enter into direct negotiations with opposition field commanders in the valley. On 16 September, an agreement was signed by the two sides providing for a number of confidence-building measures, including the reinstatement of the local authorities in local administration and freedom of movement for unarmed opposition members in the area. The Karategin agreement led to a substantial improvement in the situation. It was observed, with only minor violations, until it broke down on 1 December when the opposition retook Garm by force.

4. The ceasefire in the Karategin Valley also had a calming effect on the situation in the Tavildara sector, where efforts to engage in similar negotiations were initiated. The Karategin agreement, however, was never fully endorsed by the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) leadership and, for the negotiation on Tavildara, it insisted on dispatching a special delegation from Taloqan. While UNMOT and the Joint Commission were still trying to finalize arrangements for the delegation's travel, the opposition advanced in the Tavildara sector and, on 2 November, took Kalai-Hussein and Sagirdasht. This development had a negative impact in the Karategin Valley as tensions rose, both sides accusing the other of violations. In the third week of November, fierce fighting ensued in the Tavildara sector as the Government attempted to retake Sagirdasht, without success. At the time of reporting, government forces have been reinforced at the Khaburobot mountain pass, while UTO forces consolidated their position around Sagirdasht.

5. On 24 October, the opposition detained 37 members of the government militia (police) in the village of Shodmoni, close to Komsomolabad, conditioning their release on the Government's removal of seven new checkpoints allegedly established in contravention of the Karategin agreement. The Joint Commission and UNMOT engaged in intensive negotiations, seeking the unconditional release of the militiamen from the opposition and the removal of government checkpoints. On 8 November, the opposition released the militiamen in exchange for four UTO members in government custody. At the same time, the opposition continued to insist on the removal of the checkpoints.

6. On 26 November, UNMOT learned about government operations against opposition groups at Teppei-Samarkandi, some 18 kilometres east of Dushanbe. Repeated efforts by UNMOT to go there were thwarted by government forces, who sealed off the area.

7. In mid-November, the Karategin agreement showed signs of unravelling, as the opposition took control of the town of Komsomolabad. On 29 November, the opposition launched an attack on a government checkpoint at Chorsada, near Komsomolabad. On the morning of 1 December, the UNMOT team in Garm reported heavy fighting in that town, following an attack by the opposition in which it captured the main government building, the post office, and the buildings of the Ministries of Security and the Interior. In the early afternoon, the government forces carried out air attacks against the centre of Garm. At that point, the UNMOT team was relocated to Tajikabad for security reasons. The fighting resulted in numerous casualties and a large outflow of the local population. When the UNMOT team returned to Garm the following day, it observed opposition positions equipped with anti-aircraft machine-guns in Garm and Tajikabad. At the time of writing, the opposition controlled the area between Jirgatal and Komsomolabad. Government forces were still deployed at Garm airport but were surrounded by opposition troops.

8. Throughout 1 December, Mr. Merrem, my Special Representative for Tajikistan, was repeatedly in touch with the Government and with Mr. Abdullo Nuri, leader of the UTO. Mr. Nuri denied knowledge of the attack and said that he would order it to stop. The opposition field commanders did not receive such an order; in any event, the opposition forces continued to press their attack.

9. On 2 and 3 December, Mr. Merrem continued his intensive efforts to contain the situation, bearing in mind that a meeting between President Emomali Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri was scheduled to take place within a few days, on 9 December. On 3 December, an UNMOT team on patrol between Dushanbe and Chorsada was forcibly detained by government soldiers, beaten and its equipment taken. The team came close to being killed during its detention. They were released amid gunfire towards the Hakimi Valley from where they were able to reach Garm with the assistance of opposition fighters. In view of the lack of security, they are returning to Dushanbe via Kyrgyzstan together with the UNMOT GARM team. UNMOT has strongly protested to the Government, which apologized for the incident and promised that the culprits would be identified and dealt with.

10. The Tajik-Afghan border area was also tense, particularly in the Kalai-Khumb and Vanj sectors. Several attempts by small groups of opposition fighters to infiltrate from Afghan territory into Tajikistan were repulsed by the Russian border forces shelling across the border. UNMOT was informed by the Commander of the Russian border forces of an agreement with the Afghan border authorities barring UTO fighters from a strip 25 kilometres wide on the Afghan side of the border. The agreement grants the Russian border forces the right to enter this exclusion zone in "hot pursuit" of opposition fighters.

11. In Dushanbe, terrorist activities continued to occur, targeting mainly Russian military personnel. On 19 November, a Tajik Ministry of Defence officer of Russian origin was murdered; that same evening, the wife of a Russian serviceman was abducted. Her fate is still unknown. On 20 November, two Russian servicemen from the Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were seriously wounded in an attack by unidentified gunmen. On 22 November, a bus belonging to the Russian border forces was attacked with anti-tank rockets and small arms fire, causing one death and wounding several. In the ensuing fight, which lasted 40 minutes, Tajik and Russian soldiers captured four suspects. No one has claimed responsibility for any of these acts.

Joint Commission

12. The Joint Commission was very active, defusing tensions between government and opposition forces on the ground. The two Co-Chairmen were instrumental in achieving the 16 September agreement on a ceasefire in the Karategin Valley, there significantly defusing tensions in the area. They were active in promoting the implementation of the agreement, and in maintaining a channel of communication between the Government and the opposition.

13. In mid-September 1996, the Joint Commission addressed a statement to both the President of the Republic and the UTO leader, appealing for mutual trust and the creation of conditions conducive to the implementation of the Ashgabad agreement and the process of national reconciliation. UNMOT continued to support the work of the Joint Commission, conducting joint patrols and facilitating its meetings with the Government and opposition.

Liaison

14. UNMOT maintained close contact with the Government of Tajikistan and with the leadership of the UTO. It also maintained regular contact with the Russian

border forces and the CIS Peacekeeping Forces, both at headquarters level and in the field. It also cooperated closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It maintained close liaison with other United Nations agencies and with non-governmental organizations, staying in regular contact to facilitate needs identification and the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Freedom of movement

15. Restrictions on UNMOT's freedom of movement were imposed on a few occasions both by the Government and the opposition. On two occasions, on 30 September and 4 October, an UNMOT team was stopped at an opposition checkpoint at the village of Karasagur near Garm, harassed and physically assaulted, and shot at. UNMOT protested in writing to the UTO leadership, receiving assurances that the incident would not be repeated.

Organizational aspects

16. As of December 1996, UNMOT had an overall strength of 96, including 44 military observers from Austria (5), Bangladesh (7), Bulgaria (6), Denmark (4), Jordan (6), Poland (3), Switzerland (5), Ukraine (3) and Uruguay (5), and 33 civilian staff, of whom 20 were recruited internationally. Brigadier-General Hasan Abaza (Jordan) served as Chief Military Observer.

17. In addition to its headquarters in Dushanbe, UNMOT maintained eight team sites, in Kurgan-Tyube, Moskovskiy, Pyandzh, Tavildara, Kalai-Khumb, Vanj, Khorog and Garm. On 1 November, UNMOT opened a liaison office in Taloqan, northern Afghanistan, for the purpose of maintaining direct liaison with the leadership of the opposition based there (map attached).

Financial aspects

18. The General Assembly, by its resolution 50/238 of 7 June 1996, appropriated $7,478,900 gross for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997. Therefore, should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNMOT beyond 15 December 1996, the cost of maintaining the Mission is estimated at $623,242 gross per month, assuming continuance of its existing strength and responsibilities.

19. As at 30 November 1996, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNMOT since the inception of the Mission through 15 December 1996 amounted to $1,019,418, which represents some 6 per cent of the assessment for the Mission. The unpaid assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations amounted to $1.7 billion.

20. In the absence of new voluntary contributions, the trust fund established pursuant to Security Council resolution 968 (1994) in support of the work of the Joint Commission will be depleted by 31 December 1996. Member States are urged to contribute to the fund.

III. NEGOTIATING PROCESS

21. The negotiating process has been at a standstill since July, although both parties had agreed during the last round of talks in Ashgabat to resume them in mid-August and to concentrate on key political issues. The UTO delegation, as it has in the past, put forward a demand for changing the venue from Ashgabat to Tehran, despite the previous understanding that the talks would be conducted in a continuous round and in one place. Given the rapidly deteriorating situation and continuing disagreement on the venue, the two parties reacted positively to the proposal of my Special Representative to hold a meeting between President Rakhmonov and UTO leader Nuri, which would unblock the negotiating process and provide essential guidance to both delegations in subsequent rounds of talks.

22. In mid-September 1996, my Special Representative had consultations with President Rakhmonov in Dushanbe and UTO deputy leader Himmatzodah in Islamabad on substantive and organizational aspects of arranging the meeting of the two leaders. In addition, he had meetings with the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation (in Moscow), Kazakstan (in Almaty), Pakistan (in Islamabad) and Afghanistan (in Kabul) on issues related to the inter-Tajik political process. As a result, President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri agreed to meet in Moscow on 16 and 17 October, preceded by a preparatory working meeting of experts in Tehran.

23. The preparatory meeting in Tehran took place from 9 to 17 October 1996 and centred on the preparation of a draft agreement to be signed by the two leaders during their meeting in Moscow. Notwithstanding unresolved problems, the two sides made considerable progress in addressing the core political issues. Compromise formulas were agreed upon in the draft on several important points, including:

(a) A joint vision for the future State and society of Tajikistan, reflected in the preamble;

(b) The creation of a Commission on National Reconciliation, an authoritative body with defined responsibilities and powers;

(c) The duration of a transitional period (12-18 months);

(d) A target date for the conclusion of the inter-Tajik negotiating process (1 July 1997);

(e) Extension of the ceasefire for the entire duration of the negotiating process;

(f) The creation of a Consultative Forum of the Peoples of Tajikistan;

(g) A comprehensive amnesty through mutual forgiveness;

(h) A comprehensive exchange of prisoners of war and detainees.

Regrettably, the draft agreement was not finalized and the meeting between President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri in Moscow did not materialize, as had been agreed previously, owing to delays, mainly by the opposition side.

24. Following the inconclusive preparatory meeting in Tehran, President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri exchanged letters on the subject and, once again, reiterated their willingness to meet in Moscow, informing my Special Representative of this. In subsequent meetings of my Special Representative with Mr. Nuri in Tehran from 22 to 25 November and with President Rakhmonov in Dushanbe, an agreement was reached to hold a preliminary meeting between President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri on 9 December in northern Afghanistan. An agreement in principle was also reached on their subsequent meeting in Moscow in late December, preceded by preparatory negotiations of high-level experts of the two sides in order to complete work on the draft agreement. Both leaders agreed that my Special Representative would decide on the venue for this preparatory meeting.

25. However, given the serious deterioration of the situation in the country in the last few days, as described above, the prospects for the meeting between President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri, scheduled for 9 December in northern Afghanistan, and for subsequent preparatory talks and the meeting of the two leaders in Moscow seem increasingly uncertain at the time of writing.

IV. HUMANITARIAN AND REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

26. The overall humanitarian situation in Tajikistan has remained critical. A dramatic deterioration of the social and industrial infrastructure and a sharp decline in the provision of social, health and education services, lack of heating fuel for hospitals, schools and homes, and a sharp drop in the real income of most families have combined to render large sectors of the population in Tajikistan unable to meet even their basic food needs. The increasing number of internally displaced persons forms a special category of people who receive emergency aid from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), but are in dire need of further assistance.

27. In view of the worsening humanitarian situation, I requested the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to lead an inter-agency mission to assess the humanitarian situation and prepare recommendations on the most appropriate response of the United Nations system. The mission found that Tajikistan was faced with a situation of widespread need, with a number of pockets of acute humanitarian crisis, and recommended that the international community be alerted to the urgent need for relief. The United Nations consolidated inter-agency donor alert on urgent humanitarian needs in Tajikistan was launched in November 1996. It calls for approximately $22 million to meet urgent needs in Tajikistan for the period from December 1996 straight to May 1997. With the support of Member States, the donor alert envisages, inter alia, activities to address the issue of landmines and to strengthen field-level coordination of humanitarian assistance through the re-establishment of a Department of Humanitarian Affairs Field Coordination Unit in the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

28. The extent of the landmine problem in Tajikistan has prompted the proposal of a project on the creation of a Mine Action Centre. The Centre will develop a detailed Mine Action Plan to set up an information management system to support data collection, analysis and distribution, in order to provide the data for

adequate mine-awareness training and planning of eventual humanitarian mine clearance, and to coordinate, support and develop mine-awareness training of the population, including in UTO-controlled areas, of relevant governmental bodies, UNMOT, other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. After a political solution to the conflict is attained, additional objectives will be to develop and implement all the necessary components in achieving a governmental, prioritized mine-clearance programme coordinated with the international humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation efforts.

29. In the period covered by the present report the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) were represented in Tajikistan by established offices as were also the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) maintained a local liaison officer. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) continued implementing programmes supported by a National Programme Officer attached to UNDP. Programme-related visits were undertaken by other United Nations agencies represented regionally elsewhere in Central Asia, such as United Nations International Drug Control Programme in Tashkent and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Almaty. Furthermore, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which has signed a cooperation agreement with the United Nations also maintained an office in Tajikistan.

30. WFP manages the single largest humanitarian assistance operation in Tajikistan and coordinates all food aid to the country. Currently, 620,000 persons or around 12 per cent of in-country population are classified as most vulnerable and eligible for relief food assistance. UNICEF continued supporting government vaccination activities against diphtheria. It is also involved in rural water and sanitation activities, as well as a peace education programme conceptually linked to a UNDP-supported peace and confidence-building programme. It provides schools with educational material and renders assistance in health and nutrition. UNHCR oversees repatriation of small groups of Tajik refugees from Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. The protection aspects of refugee issues in the field are handled by OSCE. UNHCR also continues to support a legal capacity-building training programme. UNDP commenced operations of a large-scale rural rehabilitation and reconstruction programme, implemented by the United Nations Office for Project Execution. It also supports ongoing projects in peace- and confidence-building, women in development, aid coordination, governance and small enterprise development. To mobilize resources for these activities, UNDP and the Government jointly organized the first informal donors' meeting in October 1996.

31. IMF continued to assist the Government in the areas of balance of payments and budget support. Plans are under way in cooperation with UNDP to strengthen the institutional capacity of the central banking system and of the customs administration. The World Bank plans to render operational in early 1997 a $10 million poverty alleviation programme. Its $50 million rehabilitation loan package reached final approval stage. The Consultative Group meeting on Tajikistan convened by the World Bank in October 1996 pledged further support for long-term rehabilitation and development needs in Tajikistan.

V. OBSERVATIONS

32. The overall situation in Tajikistan has deteriorated in the last three months. The ceasefire has been frequently violated by both sides, although they observed it from 16 September to 1 December in the most volatile part of the country, the Karategin Valley. Information I have received from UNMOT indicates that the fighting is continuing. These developments, which contradict the stated intentions of the Tajik parties to resolve the conflict through political means, raise serious questions regarding their sincerity and intentions.

33. On the other hand, I have taken note of the recent statements of President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri on their readiness to meet in northern Afghanistan and Moscow by the end of the year. I welcome these plans and hope that the encouraging progress made during the latest round of preparatory talks in Tehran will be given substance in an agreement, which could give much-needed impetus to the negotiating process. I have instructed my Special Representative to provide any assistance required in the preparation of those meetings. In this context, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNMOT for a further period of six months. At the same time, in view of the continued violations of the ceasefire agreement by the parties, I have instructed my Special Representative to withdraw the UNMOT teams from the field to Dushanbe, awaiting further developments. I will report again to the Council in one month on the issue of compliance by the parties with the provisions of the ceasefire agreement and on possible results of the meetings between President Rakhmonov and Mr. Nuri.

34. In the present circumstances, it is imperative to restore an effective ceasefire. I appeal to the Tajik parties to cease hostilities immediately and to comply strictly with their obligations under the ceasefire agreement.

35. Regrettably, the activities of UNMOT have been impeded by threats to the security of its personnel and by restrictions on the freedom of movement of the military observers. I call upon both sides to remove these obstacles and to create the conditions necessary for the effective functioning of UNMOT.

36. I am receiving alarming reports on the deterioration of living conditions in the country, particularly in the areas affected by military confrontation. Therefore, both emergency relief and development support activities need to continue in Tajikistan in parallel. However, urgent humanitarian assistance is needed to ensure the physical survival of the most vulnerable sectors of the population and I call upon Member States to respond generously to the United Nations consolidated inter-agency donor alert.

37. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Mr. Gerd Merrem, my Special Representative and Head of Mission of UNMOT, to Brigadier-General Hasan Abaza, the Chief Military Observer, and to the women and men working with UNMOT who have served with distinction in carrying out their tasks under difficult and often dangerous conditions.

Map No. 3887 Rev. 8 UNITED NATIONS
December 1996

Department of Public Information
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